Mr. Ben Bradlee
Washington Post
1150 15 St., NW
Washington, D.C. 20071

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Dear Ben,

If by "hostility" you refer to my unhidden disappointment over the Post's imposition of policy on traditional standards of what is news and its suppression of information important to the functioning of representative society, I won't dispute your use of this word. I do remind you, however, that, given the Post's treatment of me in the past, ~~that~~ this use may be inappropriate.

You say that I overstated and that you "try to find the germs of truth." Not that I think you want help in this quest, I'll see if I can help you.

On Friday, July 8, our then ambassador to Nicaragua, Melton, whether or not he knew that any reporter was present, as I believe he didn't, told four Members of Congress and some of their staffs as well as some of his own and at least two "officials" of the State Department, "we're here to overthrow their government." The reporter present was, the managing editor of our local papers. He published a long and detailed account of his trip and what he saw and heard the morning of Wednesday, July 13. I read this before being driven to Washington for a regular cardiovascular examination, stopped off en route at a newsstand and got all the copies of the paper it had and, after my return home, phoned the foreign desk of the Post and read this direct quotation to the person who answered the phone. I was referred to John Goshko at State, read it to him, paraphrased part of the rest of this first-person account to him and offered to send him one of the copies of the papers I'd bought. He didn't want a copy and responded only "we're aware." This is fact and I separate it from opinion: that there is an enormous and well-recognized difference under international law and usage between what is common knowledge and is denied officially and what is stated officially. This administration, under a variety of false claims, denies that it intended to overthrow this government, which it does not like, but the fact is that now our own ambassador stated without any ifs or buts that it is our policy to overthrow that government. Under what I was taught are traditional news standards some 60 years ago I believe that the ambassador's undenied statement is legitimate news. and important.

The Nicaraguan government expelled him for, in effect, implementing the policy he stated, about four days later. The Post reported that restricting itself to what our government stated and then, when he appeared before the Senate intelligence committee Goshko, as I recall, reported his appearance and the chairman's statement that the ambassador had testified that he hadn't done anything to violate accepted standards and hadn't the foggiest notion of what the Nicaraguans were talking about. This is, obviously, untrue and the Post knew it was not true, not only because everybody knows what this administration's policy is and has been but because it also knew, Goshko in particular and your foreign desk in general, that the ambassador had stated quite clearly that our policy is to overthrow that government. The Post published only the official line and, and I hope you will not consider this "vituperation," suppressed the proof that our government was lying to the legislature, the press and the people of this country and the world.

I believe, and I hope you would not disagree, that if some of the Members of Congress knew that Ambassador Melton said that we are in Nicaragua to overthrow their government, it would be considerably more difficult for the administration to get any further help for the Contras and I think it is obvious that the editorial policy of the Post supports the Contras.

This particular "Congressional" delegation was not there on behalf of any committee of the Congress and was, in fact, a White House delegation. Ostensibly

they were to observe "human rights" in Nicaragua and for this the White House had them leave sometime Friday and leave the Nicaragua airport at 1 p.m. Sunday. If it did nothing else, do you believe this was enough time for anything that can decently be considered any kind of inquiry? This delegation was flown in military aircraft and some or all the other expenses were met by the National Forum Foundation, whatever that may be and wherever it gets its money.

According to Embassy press office Jan Hartman there were about 50 such "codels" last year. Do you think that it takes 50 such weekend warrior inquiries a year for the Congress to know what the "human rights" situation is in Nicaragua? Particularly when, according to Hartman, they all do the same thing, see opposition business leaders, La Prensa and the cardinal?

Do you think this is a proper way to spend taxpayers money or to use the military and its equipment? Assuming that military aircraft were used by the White House on all these delegations, and I don't know where else it could have gotten such a considerable sum of funding, do you think it is not newsworthy that when the military can't get all the money it wants for "defense" and there are so many other needs not met that military planes should fly about 150,000 miles a year, with all the other attendant costs? Aside from the unhidden purposes, to persuade Members to support administration policies and acts that violate law, national and international, and all our diplomatic obligations, including to the hemisphere and the UN? Not even a teensy-weensy "germ" in this and so much more like it?

Do you recall any reporting of 50 such junkets a year with some if not all the considerable costs coming, whether or not legally and properly, from tax moneys? Or can you be at all suspicious, experienced journalist that you are, that there are so many Members and their staffs, all paid by tax money, and others on the government payroll involved in so many ways, involved in this White House lobbying operation?

This delegation was transported by the embassy in bullet-proof vans, so necessary that the jogger Mrs. Byron followed her usual practise by jogging in Managua. Mrs. Byron, according to either the embassy or a State "official", was included in this delegation because of her considerable prior experience. In her own words this included being transported to Contra bases in Honduras, which continues to deny officially that they exist, whence she crossed the border into Nicaragua with a Contra contingent. Is it reasonable to wonder whether those sponsoring this junket worried about her stepping on a mine of which there are so many in Nicaragua? Or how, if she did, this would or could have influenced Congressional and popular support for the Reagan campaign against Nicaragua?

This delegation coincided with the scheduled anti-government demonstration in Nandaime. Mrs. Byron and the State and embassy people strongly urged that no employee or official be present. Mrs. Byron spelled out in advance precisely what did happen if any were present and over all these objections Halton said their going would be "fine." He provided two readily identified embassy vehicles and Mrs. Byron and the other woman Member did not go. Exactly what every opponent to this obvious provocation said would happen then followed. Included among those photographed giving what was taken as signs of encouragement and incitation was our local editor, Mike Powell. His oped page piece was picked up by the Times, I'm told. Of course it wasn't news when employees of the embassy, State and the Congress, along with two Members, were present and seemed to be participating where violence was expectable if not inspired and in the face of the foregoing and more, all of which the Post saw fit not to report, it did, without indicating it knew the official line was false, give the official mythology considerable attention. Nor was it news that the ambassador saw to it that all these people would be subject to injury where violence was expectable. (I don't know whether any woman staffer was there. Congressman DeLay's selection of his staffer most prepared for helping him "observe" what is referred to as "human rights" was his woman press officer. (Isn't he the sponsor of a resolution the administration favors?)

Aside from all the harm to and fatalities among Latin Americans from this administration's programs which the Post supports, is it not apparent that there was the possibility of injury to Americans whose salaries are paid from tax money? Was any such risk essential to the performance of any proper duty or responsibility? With some 50 such delegations the year before, was there any real possibility that these people could have added anything to what was known, including by the Congress? Or, as in Mrs. Byron's case, was there something like a quid pro quo for the Members whose presence was paid for from the Treasury? Mrs. Byron, who is opposed for re-election, had the managing editor and a photographer from the only daily papers in the county in which she lives and they have the largest circulation in her district. And how many times did we have to pay for getting her there and back for her to know enough about the situation there? Assuming that she could learn anything new in a day and parts of two days when she saw only the same people she had seen and spoken to repeatedly in the past and who could write or speak to her by phone.

If my intentions were hostile, do you suppose it would not occur to me to get in touch with a journalism review, which I won't and haven't? Have I really overstated anything? Is there nothing at all newsworthy in what I encapsulate above? Nothing that as an editor you believe ought either in fairness in reporting or in the interest of the Post's reputation ought be known to either the electorate or the legislators when legislation is pending? Nothing that can have anything to do with more killing, more expenditures of tax money, the validity of administration policy and the honesty with which the Congress was addressed both by Melton and the administration? The Post doesn't report when it has reason to believe that, particularly in this enflamed situation, an expelled ambassador, who may have a further career elsewhere, lied to the Congress?

Except when I was overswas in World War II I've seen the Post daily since the early 1930s. I also see other papers and I listen to radio news. So I have an idea of what other editors consider to be news and the Post does not publish. Not uncommonly now this includes what is not supportive of the administrations policies and the Post's. Just today the Baltimore Sun, which is usually smaller than our local papers and has only parts of eight pages of other than local news most days, sometimes less, published the story of this nature that I enclose. I hear much about what Colonel North is up to that the Post does not publish as well as what he was accused of doing in Congressional testimony that I do not recall seeing in the Post. Overup <u>that</u> much?

My work, as I believe I've told you, has not been the pursuit of any whodunit and it has been a large study of how our basic institutions, of which the press is one, functioned or failed to function in time of great crisis and since then. When any of our major institutions fails to function as it should under our system, the syetem itself is in jeopardy, I believe and what we were taught in school says. This is why I've written you, in the perhaps forlorn hope that you and Mrs. Graham and others would give this some thought. For all its failings, ours is the best system of self-government yet devised by man, but it can't work as it should unless those who have the obligation to make it work do not meet this obligation. I've tried to meet mine by giving a considerable amout of time to reporters, including a number from the Post and many others in all media, even though I knew that they disagree with me. FOIA made me surrogate for the people and everyone has access to my files, with copies. I don't think you will find any Post or any other reporter who will say that I was not open and honest or that I ever misled or was factually wrong.

You don't have to respond and you didn't really respond to my earlier letter. I have only one purpose, to try to get you to give all of this some thought.

Sincerely,

Harold